

edward johnson building
faculty of music
university of toronto



ORFORD STRING QUARTET

ANDREW DAWES, Violin

TERENCE HELMER, Viola

KENNETH PERKINS, Violin

MARCEL ST-CYR, cello

QUARTET-IN-RESIDENCE

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 10, 1978

3 P.M.

WALTER HALL

PROGRAM

Quartet in D minor, Op. 76, No. 2

Joseph Haydn

Allegro

Andante o più tosto allegretto

Menuetto. Allegro ma non troppo

Vivace assai

In the six quartets of Op. 76, written in 1797 for Count Joseph Erdödy, Haydn has brought to fruition his immense technical virtuosity and a new profundity which is at the same time more personal and more direct. When the historian Charles Burney first heard these quartets in 1799, he wrote to the composer that he "never received more pleasure from instrumental music; they are full of invention, fire, good taste, and new effects." Haydn was aware of his pre-eminent position as Europe's greatest living composer, and the self-confidence of this music is enormous. The first movement of No. 2 is a superb example of Haydn's concentrated thought. Most of the musical material is derived from the falling fifths ("die Quinten") which initiate the opening theme. In the recapitulation the essence of the first section is miraculously compressed into a smaller space to allow room for the expansion of the fiery and uncompromising coda. The interval of the fifth as a constructive element is present in each of the other movements in a variety of guises.

The charming Andante acts as a foil to the intellectual intensity of the opening Allegro and to the following "Witches' Minuet", where the bizarre effect of octave doublings and strict canon between upper and lower strings is at once reminiscent of Haydn's experimental music ca. 1772 and of the Scherzos to be found in Beethoven's Trios Op. 1. The Finale is in D minor, but changes to D major near the end with a result both ethereal and immensely satisfying. Since Op. 76 is contemporary with The Creation, it is perhaps not surprising that Haydn should conclude with an analogy to the idea expressed there in the great passage from minor to major at the words, "Let there be light."

Quartet No. 1, Op. 25

Benjamin Britten

Andante sostenuto; Allegro vivo

Allegretto con slancio

Andante calmo

Molto vivace

Numbering among Britten's limited but important contributions to chamber music literature are two string quartets. Written during the composer's stay in the United States in the early years of World War II and dedicated to the well-known patron of music, Mrs. Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, the First Quartet was composed for the Coolidge Quartet and first performed in Los Angeles in 1941. Britten forged a lyrical and exuberant work, drawing on the great tradition of quartet writing at a time when he recognized the necessity of form and discipline in shaping his romanticism. Contrasting elements are combined in the first movement through an ingenious handling of sonata form. A slow introduction of soft, bright chords high up in the strings leads to a subtly-related and energetic first theme, and a second, scale-wise subject stated by the first violin and repeated in inversion by the cello. These ideas proceed by alternation through development and recapitulation, with the introduction returning in abridged form as a coda. Asymmetrical phrasing, deliberately jerky modulations, and juxtapositions of unison writing with brisk contrapuntal figures characterise the boisterous Allegretto. It is, in short, a contemporary application of the outstanding Scherzo devices to be found in Beethoven's late quartets. A beautiful, unadorned melody for the first violin and a declamatory central section first announced by the cello provide the focus for the Andante calmo in 5/4 time. The quiet lilt of the piece foreshadows the Moonlight Interlude in Peter Grimes. On the surface, the Finale is an exhilarating sonata-rondo, but carefully-wrought cross references to other movements underline the architectural importance of this Molto Vivace.

I N T E R M I S S I O N

Quartet in G major, Op. 161

Franz Schubert

Allegro molto moderato

Andante un poco moto

Scherzo - Allegro vivace

Allegro assai

The manuscript of Schubert's last String Quartet, in G major, is dated June 20-30, 1826, although it is evident that a work of such scope must have been in his mind for months or even years before. It is strikingly more symphonic in breadth than the preceding two quartets of 1824, the A minor and D minor, and is perhaps, of all Schubert's works, the most concentrated, highly organized, and consciously designed. In some ways the relative absence of song is uncharacteristic, but at the same time Schubert himself saw his later chamber music as studies "paving the way toward a grand symphony." And, indeed, the Scherzo reminds us of the comparable movement in the Great C Major Symphony. This Quartet abounds in tremolo passages in the melodic line as well as the accompaniment, double and triple stops, unisons and other devices which threaten to burst the bounds of soloistic quartet writing.

A dialectical conflict between major and minor mode is a Viennese, and thus a Schubertian preoccupation, and one which shapes much of the design of the first movement. The Finale, a long, energetic and inventive rondo, again rests on the kaleidoscopic effect of the minor and third-related colouration, ending with a Haydnesque tune in G major. In between are an emotionally evocative slow movement, which contrasts a calm and a melodramatically troubled mood, and the Scherzo which one writer picturesquely described as "a phantom from the region of ghostly romance."

Only the first movement was performed in March, 1828 at the only all-Schubert public concert to be held during the composer's lifetime. The enthusiastic reception seemed to promise a long-awaited and widespread acceptance of Schubert's music, but the composer's renewed hopes and creative energies were soon to be cut short by his premature death in November of that same year.

Notes by Patricia Sauerbrei

Next Event: Opera Department's production of Britten's
"The Rape of Lucretia", MacMillan Theatre, Dec. 15, 16, 8 p.m.

Next Orford Quartet Concert: February 4, 1979, Walter Hall, 3 p.m.